

# Take Control of TV and Other Screen Time

American children spend as much time watching TV as they spend in school or doing any other activity besides sleep.

Watching television occupies many kids for several hours each day, and can result in less physical activity, more overeating, and a higher risk for becoming overweight. Why? Because watching TV means being inactive while viewing, snacking more, and getting exposed to lots of advertising for high fat, high sugar foods. Kids who watch several hours of television each day are very vulnerable to the effects of violent content. And school performance can suffer if TV viewing gets in the way of times spent on activities such as reading and homework. Setting limits on kids' TV time is important for their health and development now, and as they grow into adulthood.

## Suggested Rules to Live By:

- 2 hours/day or less\* of total screen time—TV, non-school related computer, and video games
- No TV during meal times
- No TV during homework
- No television sets in any bedrooms
- No eating while watching TV
- No surfing—watch favorite shows only
- Limit viewing to specific days/times

\*American Academy of Pediatrics

## Tips for Success:

**Use Technology:** Screening devices (like TiVo) can remove advertising, and allow you to view TV programs in less time.

**Be a good role model:** Keep a check on your own TV viewing habits...kids will take their cues from you.

**Endure kids' complaints:** This may be a parent's biggest challenge. Stick it out!

**Help kids deal with boredom:** Be prepared to suggest other activities. Over time, kids will learn to entertain themselves.

## What can kids do instead?

Keeping kids busy with positive activities can be a challenge, but you may find many resources once you begin to look. Check into local sports and recreation programs that are offered after school and on weekends. Some programs are offered free through schools or town government, and many offer scholarships.

Provided by the Prevention Research Center at Harvard School of Public Health.